

Meet Me After the Rain

One summer.
Two strangers.
A second chance.



JULIET ROWE

CHAPTER ONE

A table for nobody

The cafe had one dry table, and someone had left a book on it. Alice decided a book did not count as a person. She set her coffee beside it and folded her dripping umbrella beneath the chair.

'That's the ending,' a man said. She looked up. He was holding two plates and wearing the expression of someone who had already apologized several times that morning.

'Sorry?' 'Your coffee. It's on the last chapter.' Alice lifted the cup. A pale ring had formed across the paperback. 'Maybe it needed a different ending.'

He considered this, then put one of the plates in front of her. A croissant, slightly collapsed. 'So did my breakfast. I ordered one.'

Beyond the striped awning, Paris disappeared into silver rain. Alice had come here to be alone for six weeks. She had managed eleven minutes.

CHAPTER ONE / CONTINUED

The spare croissant

His name was Theo. He restored painted signs, which Alice initially understood to mean that he painted signs, until he explained the pleasure of finding a blue beneath a green beneath fifty years of weather.

'And you?' he asked. 'Between things.' 'A very crowded profession.' She laughed before deciding whether she wanted to.

Her phone lit up beside the damaged novel. Three messages from London. She turned it over. Theo noticed, but did not perform the kindness of pretending not to notice. Instead he tore his croissant in half and asked whether she liked the rain.

'From indoors,' she said. 'A reasonable position.' He pointed across the street to a faded sign above a closed florist. 'I'm supposed to be up a ladder.'

Alice looked at the rain, then at the empty half of the table. 'Terrible luck,' she said.

CHAPTER ONE / CONTINUED

Tomorrow, perhaps

When the clouds finally broke, neither of them moved. A waiter collected the plates, wiped the table around their cups, and asked whether this was now an office.

Theo stood first. He wrote something on the paper sleeve around her coffee and slid it back. Not a number. A title. 'A book with a better ending,' he said.

Alice watched him cross to the florist, where he unfolded a ladder and became, almost immediately, a person at work. She had liked him more when he belonged only to the morning.

At the corner, she opened her umbrella out of habit. The sky was blue. She closed it, smiling at herself, and turned toward the river.

Only later, in the pocket of her coat, did she find the second line he had written beneath the title: Same table if it rains.